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Full Length Research Paper

Contextual Realities of Youth Livelihoods in Botswana: A Gender Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Despite the complexity surrounding the concept of youth, the twenty first century is witnessing publication of reports by major international organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations agencies calling for the recognition of and more attention to youth and their livelihoods. As a response to such reports, development interventions geared towards improving youth livelihoods are being formulated in developing countries. This paper presents findings of a qualitative case study which sought to understand youth livelihoods from the perspective of young women engaged in street vending in Botswana. It focused on how the participants define and respond to contextual factors shaping their livelihood trajectories. The findings reveal that livelihoods of 'the' youth in Botswana are shaped by diverse and complex socio-cultural contexts that are inextricably interconnected. The family emerged to be the main context within which 'youth' enact their livelihoods. This paper contends that it is close to impossible to understand youth livelihoods in Botswana without situating them within the gendered contexts and the multidimensionality of poverty within their families.

Keywords: Botswana, gender, qualitative research, young women, youth livelihoods

INTRODUCTION

In spite of its widespread use and increasing recognition within the field of development, there is no universally agreed definition as to what 'youth' actually constitutes. I have already published a book chapter which deals with the complexity surrounding the concept of youth (see Joseph, 2011b). However, for the purposes of this paper, the term youth is used interchangeably with young people. In general terms, youth is a word carrying a great deal of baggage having both social and biological meaning as well as having both historical and spatial dimensions (Spence, 2006).

The literature on youth in Botswana points to contradictions which obscure age-based definitions of youth (Maudeni, 2004; McIlwaine and Datta, 2004; Preece and Mosweunyane, 2004). Botswana National Youth Policy 1996 defines youth as individuals aged 12-29 years but according to the Revised National Youth Policy 2010 youth refers to persons of ages 15-35 years. However, to comply with the legal age of majority of 18 years, the study from which this paper is base adopted

the definition of youth used in the Young Farmers Fund, a financial scheme introduced by the Government of Botswana in 2007 to target youth aged 18 years to 35 years (extended in 2009 to include people aged 40 years).

It is now recognised that young people in the globalising world are making transition to adulthood in societies characterised by erosion of crucial social structures such as the family (Ansell, 2005; Blum, 2007; Chigunta et al., 2005). The United Nations states in its World Youth Report of 2007 that "in spite of the many positive developments, the challenges to the development of the youth population in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and to their participation in national development remain monumental" (United Nations, 2007: 110). This is due to the limited availability and restricted accessibility of intergenerational transmission of key livelihood resources in this era of HIV/AIDS (van Blerk et al., 2008).

The subject of youth livelihoods, defined herein as the

means, capabilities, assets, social institutions and relations that youth require to generate and maintain their means of living and enhance their wellbeing is attracting attention in SSA (Chant and Jones, 2005; Chigunta et al., 2005; van Blerk et al., 2008). This attention attempts to address youth empowerment, a process of enhancing youth's possibilities and capabilities to gain control over the conditions of their lives (Chigunta et al., 2005), which has become one of the paramount goals of international development. Of all youth worldwide, 85% live in developing countries and young people aged between 15 and 34 years accounted for 34% of the total population of SSA in 2005 (United Nations, 2005, 2007). The World Youth Report 2007 states that 'the demographic picture makes it patently evident that engaging youth fully in sub-Saharan Africa's development is not a matter of choice, but rather an imperative for national development' (United Nations, 2007: 83).

International reports also reveal that, girls and young women face double discrimination perpetuated by their sex and age such that in many societies they remain at the bottom of the social, economic, educational, and political ladder. Gender associated stereotypes are differently used in every society to ascribe gender roles to different sexes, and as such, are cultural excuses to discriminate between male and female (Lindsey, 1990). Generally, misconceptions of equating gender (power relations between women and men) with women strengthen stereotypes which subordinate women in all most all aspects of life.

Stereotypes associated with generational categories are used to ascribe roles, privileges and behaviour as people make their transition from childhood to adulthood. Even though different societies use different stereotypes to prescribe gender and generational roles, young women tend to be disadvantaged in almost all societies than their male counterparts, hence the double discrimination of sex and age.

United Nations (2007: 93) concludes that 'social and cultural factors probably account for the relative absence of young women [in SSA] from many fields of study [and they] tend to have little say in the career they pursue and may be directed towards fields of study that are considered appropriate for females'. This paper presents findings from a qualitative case study which sought to understand youth livelihoods in Botswana from the lived experiences and points of view of young women engaged in urban street vending in Gaborone City. It briefly highlights the gendered nature of development initiatives geared towards the empowerment of youth in the country. It moves on to describe research methodology and then presents and discusses the research findings.

Gendered youth initiatives in Botswana

Botswana is generally regarded as an emerging 'success story', not only across Africa but also in other developing

countries, having graduated from being one of the poorest countries in the world to a middle income country (Wikan, 2004). Botswana's remarkable progress over the past four decades of independence since 1966 is underpinned by its commitment to multiparty democratic governance and adoption of prudent economic management policies (Republic of Botswana, 2003; Wikan, 2004). Similar to most SSA countries, Botswana has a youthful population. Youth, defined by the National Youth Policy 1996 as a young male and female person aged between 12 and 29 years (Republic of Botswana, 1996) constituted 43% of the total 1.7 million people in the country as reported in the 2001 population and housing census (Central Statistics Office, 2001).

Similarly to other parts of the world 'youth remain a high profile "issue" in the [Botswana's] public realm due both to expectations of young people as future leaders and negative stereotypes of them as exhibiting "high-risk" behaviours among which early and underage sex are emphasised' (McIlwaine and Datta, 2004: 488). Being a signatory to a number of international declarations on poverty reduction and those which relate to youth and gender or women empowerment, Botswana has taken steps to fulfil its commitment. With the aim to attain citizen economic empowerment, the Government of Botswana has developed direct and supportive policies and programmes as strategies to the national needs embedded in its large youthful sector (Lekau, 2001; Republic of Botswana, 2003). In 1996, the Government of Botswana formulated and adopted the first National Youth Policy, which led to the creation of a national level Department of Culture and Youth tasked with developing and reviewing policies and programmes in all matters relating to youth.

Notwithstanding the Government of Botswana's continued efforts to empower its youth, it is apparent that the majority of young people in the country continue to face a number of challenges that negatively impact upon their livelihood situations. The country's accolades as an African success story are tarnished by high rates of HIV/AIDS; overdependence on the depleting diamonds stocks with lack of economic diversification; high unemployment rates; and persistent income inequalities mostly affecting youth (Preece and Mosweunyane, 2004). Even though unemployment in the country increased marginally from 21% in 1994 to 24% in 2001, 70% of those unemployed are aged below 30 years (Central Statistics Office, 2001). Fuelled largely by diamond production, economic growth in Botswana has remained concentrated in urban areas, leaving many rural areas marked by widespread poverty (Hope and Edge, 1996). This high rate of rural-urban disparity is leading to an uneven distribution of youth in the country with a greater concentration in urban areas, which constituted 57% of the total national youth population in 2001 (Lekau, 2001).

Both the National Youth Policy 1996 and the Revised National Youth Policy 2010 recognises the heterogeneity

of youth in relation to differences in gender, vulnerability status, educational level, employment status, social responsibilities, material wellbeing, geographical location, and disability status. Amongst the various categories of youth identified as being vulnerable or at risk, young women appear to be the most crucial category of them all. To confirm this argument, one needs to look at recent studies covering a wide range of aspects of gender and development in Botswana, which indicate that gender inequality is still prevailing in structuring livelihood opportunities in the country (Commeyras and Montsi, 2000; McIlwaine and Datta, 2004; Mooko, 2005; Phaladze and Tlou, 2006).

These studies acknowledge that, despite progress that has been made by Botswana in addressing gender inequality, disparities in skills, education, employment, decision making at all levels between men and women remain acute, largely due to deeply rooted patriarchy. For instance, 'although Botswana is an example of a country following best practice in HIV/AIDS prevention and control in sub-Saharan Africa, AIDS is the leading cause of death for young 'adult' women aged between 15 and 19 years old' (Phaladze and Tlou, 2006: 23).

Despite that young women constitute 53% of the few youth who have to date benefited from the out-of-school youth grant, they dominate in sectors conventionally taken to be feminine, social services (67%) and fashion design (81%), and young men dominate engineering (67%) and fine arts (82%), sectors taken to be masculine in nature (Republic of Botswana, 2006). There is every reason, therefore, to believe that efforts to enhance livelihoods of youth in Botswana still remain to a larger extent structured around gender lines. Inadequate linkages appear to be made between development initiatives geared towards youth empowerment and socio-cultural contexts within which youth are embedded. It appears that such narrowness in policy making falls short in embracing the lived experiences and points of view of youth.

METHODOLOGY

This section briefly summarizes the methodological approach the study adopted. A detailed paper on how the study was conceptualized and designed was published in peer-reviewed proceedings of an international conference on research methodology (see Joseph, 2011a).

Conceptual approaches

The study was informed by theoretical positions of social constructionism and the life course. Social constructionism premises that there is no single social reality but instead an existence of multiple realities (Burr, 2003). It emphasises the need for researchers and policy makers to move away from trying to ascertain

objective conditions of livelihoods and understand the plurality of livelihood constructions (Jones, 2002). In order to define young women who are the focus of this study, reference is made to two socially constructed concepts of youth and gender with elusive and contested meanings. Transitions from childhood to youth to adulthood are also socially constructed (McIlwaine and Datta, 2004).

Life course emphasises the interlocking nature of people's lives over time as well as viewing individuals as choice makers and agents of their own livelihood trajectories (Giele and Elder, 1998). It consists of four aspects of human agency, linked lives, location in time and place, and timing in lives. This approach recognises that people do not live their lives in isolation but they are embedded within historically situated socio-cultural contexts. The study also draws from recent emphasises that children and youth are not only becoming future adults but their present being and diverse belonging are very important (Ansell, 2005; van Blerk et al., 2008).

Research design and participants

The study adopted a qualitative approach based on triangulation of different methods. Qualitative research is interested in meanings people attach to their livelihoods within their own real life contexts and the use of multiple methods was an attempt to get an in-depth understanding of this phenomenon (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Punch, 1998). Qualitative data provide depth and detail through direct quotation and careful description of situations, events, interactions and observed behaviours (Labuschagne, 2003). Although the study was conceptualised to focus on young women, it embraced the flexibility and emergent principles of qualitative research designs by considering perspectives of other key participants.

Selections of the research participants was based on a diagrammatic model the author developed to guide the study beyond the mere engagement of young women in street vending, and explore their livelihoods within their real life contexts of social interactions. It was conceptualised on the basis of case study design by integrating key concepts in understanding livelihoods of these young women, namely, youth, gender, and street vending. The key participants consisted of a sample of young women engaged in street vending, young women not engaged in street vending, young men engaged in street vending, and adult women engaged in street vending (women aged above 35 years).

Data collection and analysis

The study was approved by the author's University Committee on Research Ethics, and research permit in Botswana was granted by the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs. Informed verbal consent was continuously

negotiated with each and every research participant at their street vending sites during their time of work. Data collection lasted for eight months between 1 September 2007 and 30 April 2008 and inductive and iterative data analysis was undertaken concurrently with and continued after data collection exercise. Data consists of 23 audiotaped life history interviews (17 young women, 2 young men, 4 older women, plus photographic diaries and life charts); 8 written life stories by young women; 46 self-administered questionnaires with youth; 2 face-to-face interviews with older women; 4 self-administered questionnaires with organizations; fieldnotes; policies and the media.

The study involved rich life history data and thus narrative analysis became the technique for analyzing data (Atkinson, 1998; Bryman, 2008; Conle, 2000). It consisted of identifying themes through a process of thorough side by side reading and re-reading of the transcripts, fieldnotes, and other data sets (Bryman, 2008: 554). As a research approach, narrative is not confined to data representation, but it is an entire mode of inquiry where data analysis and final documents do not have to relinquish their narrative quality (Conle 2000: 51).

RESULTS

This part presents findings to address the research question, how do young women engaged in street vending in Gaborone and other key participants define their lived experiences in the process of obtaining a livelihood and what meanings do they attach to significant episodes? The argument advanced here is that to better understand livelihoods of youth it is essential to consider broader contextual realities of their lives as explained by them in their own words. This paper presents three thematic narratives of the dynamics of familial belonging, multidimensionality of poverty, and gendered power relations that emerged to signify complex ways in which the research participants define their lived experiences. Pseudonyms are used to maintain both the human element and anonymity of the research participants.

The dynamics of familial belonging

The family emerged from this study to be a significant social institution in the way the research participants define their lived experiences in the process of obtaining a livelihood. Most of them interpreted their livelihood situations with reference to historical events linked to dynamics of life within their familial belonging, particularly the bleak side of it. Tshegetsang, a young woman whose education was disrupted by her parents' divorce, and Garenagae, a young man belonging to a family without a place to call home respectively said:

My parents divorced in 1989 and my custody

was given to my father. I have three siblings and following our parents' divorce, the two of us remained with our father and the other two went with our mother. Our father was staying with another wife and I could not cope...I was attached more to my mother...Children know their parents better than the Courts of Law. (Tshegetsang)

I have one brother and four sisters....We are many in our family but we do not stay in one place. We are scattered all over. Our mother is also renting a room. Let me say we have no place to call home. Everyone is concerned with his/her own life...That is why I am here, doing this street vending business...We are unable to meet and discuss family issues...We are struggling in life because we did not grow up in a proper family in the first place. (Garenagae)

Although they define their lived experiences differently, it is evident from the above two extracts that livelihood trajectories of both Tshegetsang and Garenagae were made vulnerable by and/or are linked to historical episodes which occurred within their families of origin. It also emerged that livelihood trajectories of most of the research participants irrespective of age and/or sex are inextricably linked to conflicts within their familial belonging. This is evidenced by the following extract from a written life story by Lemogang, an intelligent young woman who experienced a negative turning point in her rather potential academic path upon understanding the nature of a longstanding conflict within her family:

There were a lot of problems in our family when I was still growing up [child]. I started schooling when I was grown up at the age of nine years. I was fortunate because I was a bright student and I have never repeated any class. There were serious conflicts in our family but I did not understand what was going on. I came to understand it when I was at secondary school and I ended up failing. The conflict is still there even though it is not as bad as it used to.

Although she does not specify the exact nature of conflict within their family, Lemogang draws attention to the fact that the family as a complex socio-cultural institution is a context of diverse contestations and contradictions that are dynamic and/or which evolve over time. From another perspective, an old woman explicitly reveals in the following extract that she was never 'welcomed' within her maternal family straight from the beginning of her life:

As you can see that I have written that "I think I have not enjoyed my childhood". This is because I have experienced a lot of problems when I was

still a child. The problems I am facing are rooted in my family background. My mother's parents never welcomed my biological father in their family as they disliked his tribe. This is the problem that negatively impacted on my life ever since. If they could have welcomed him, they could have welcomed me in their family with love.

Mma Tshimologo's narrative highlights that different families within which the participants belong uphold to particular traditional beliefs which structure their livelihood trajectories. It emerged that such beliefs appear to influence the ways in which some of the participants construct their dynamic personal identities. As captured by Garenagae's narrative presented above, some of the participants are confused about the situation within their families due to the changing family contexts and their changing personal identities over a life course. Ndindoga, a cohabiting young mother of three who wants to get married reveals in the following narrative family dynamics hindering her transition to this adulthood status:

I was born after my mother divorced from her first marriage. She left me with her mother and brother when she re-married. I have four siblings, two elderly ones from her first marriage and two younger ones from her second marriage. I use her father's name as my surname and my siblings use their own father's names. When I informed my uncle that I want to get married, he referred me to my stepfather who referred me back saying that my uncle is the one who is responsible for me. I am confused. I do not know where I belong and what kind of a person I am. I do not know where and how to build my children's future.

A closer look at the above personal narrative of Ndindoga clearly reveals that livelihood trajectories of youth are inextricably linked both to marital status of their own parents and to the dynamics of familial contexts within which their parents are embedded. When viewed from a life course perspective, the lived experiences of Ndindoga as an individual born outside marriage appear to suggest that marriage is a desirable transitional status to adulthood and a potential means towards improving livelihoods. It therefore appears that Ndindoga and other young women in situation similar to hers who 'time' their personal transition to adulthood through 'family negotiated marriage' are more likely to remain in a state of uncertainty until their familial belonging becomes supportive. The foregoing discussion reveals that most of the research participants in this study differently define the dynamics of familial belonging as negatively impacting on their livelihood trajectories. It is equally important to indicate that not all of them portrayed their

families negatively.

All the above extracts indicate that livelihood trajectories of the research participants have been directly and/or indirectly affected by negative (and/or positive) episodes/events and transitions that happened in their families of birth during and/or after their childhood. The dynamics of familial belonging due to death/sickness, marriage/divorce, desertion/single parenthood, dysfunctional extended family systems, and poverty emerged to be significant. These findings clearly demonstrate that livelihood trajectories of youth are hindered and/or supported by the changing family contexts within which they are embedded. It emerged from the study that, familial contexts to which 'youth' belong extend beyond their families of origin/birth to include those 'families' they establish for themselves with their own children and/or partners/peers.

These diverse lived experiences provide important development policy insights into the extent to which familial belonging matters to 'youth' in Botswana in the process of obtaining a livelihood over their life courses. This study supports the call to view youth livelihoods in developing countries from the perspective of *negotiated interdependences* (Francis, 2000; Punch, 2002). It hinges upon a conclusion by White (2002a: 1103) that "children [and youth] do not constitute a social category that can be abstracted from its [familial] context". It confirms the significant role of the *linked lives* aspect of the life-course, which emphasizes that individuals are embedded in a complex web of social relationships that differently shape their livelihoods (Drobnic and Blossfeld, 2004; Giele and Elder, 1998).

Multidimensionality of poverty

An important development approach for this particular study is the broad conceptualization of poverty as a complex multidimensional phenomenon, not only as insufficient income (Israel and Seeborg, 1998; Masanjala, 2007). By emphasising the dynamics of familial belonging the participants are basically contextualising the multidimensionality of their poverty beyond their apparent engagement in street vending. The extracts presented above indicate that livelihood trajectories of most of the participants are embedded within familial contexts which can be described as 'poor family backgrounds'. In the process of obtaining a livelihood the participants do so under the realities of poverty. Mma Mosalaesi, a single old woman with four dependants describes traumatic experiences and circumstances that exacerbated her poverty from her childhood to adulthood:

I only went up to standard 7 due to poverty in our family...My childhood was fine because I was used to the life in our family. I passed my standard 7 with grade C in 1983 but I was unable

to go to secondary school. My parents had no money to pay for my school fees. I worked in namola leuba [draught relief projects] and as a housemaid to pay for my younger sister's education. I came to Gaborone in 1992 but I only found temporary jobs. I was forced to go back home in 1996 to stay with our sick mother following the death of our father. My life was fine until the father of my child passed away in 2001. My sister who was assisting me passed away in 2005. She left two children and the youngest is disabled. I am struggling with this business to support my three children and my sick mother.

Mma Mosalaesi does not only reveal distressing dynamics within her familial belonging but she is also highlighting that poverty is not merely lack of livelihood resources but an identity, which some people get used to and/or associate themselves with. This self-positioning by poor people is evident in the following personal narrative given by Matshwenyego, a young woman who maintains that her poverty is not just lack of money but a condition that is inseparable from her life course due to her poor family background:

I started this small business after I was retrenched from work....When I thought of going back home I found that it is another story. Life was going to be very difficult for me. If you do not have money and you come from a poor family like mine then you will remain poor the rest of your life.

Most of the participants are not only labelling their poverty as a condition deeply entrenched within their familial belonging but they also reveal its psychological impacts. For instance, Matshwenyego reveals that thinking of going back to her poor familial belonging after being laid off at work made her very nervous. Tshotlego acknowledges that her unwillingness to engage in agricultural activities is basically a reflection of the demoralising impacts of enduring poverty within her family which survives through food basket from the government:

What discouraged me about this out-of-school youth grant is that they emphasise on agriculture. To tell you the truth, I am not active in life to run an agricultural business. I do not know whether is because I suffered a lot in life. I think my poor background has demoralised me...Nowadays only adults get employed because they have money to buy jobs... If you are like me with parents who own nothing then you just look at jobs adverts and ignore them. Only youth from families with cattle [rich] get jobs. It is now a tsisa o tseye [give and take]

business.

It is essential to highlight two interrelated points encapsulated within Tshotlego's narrative. First, most of the research participants indicated that they are unable to access development initiatives geared towards youth empowerment mainly due to corrupt practices of nepotism. Second, some associate lack of access to employment opportunities amongst youth (based on age) to adults who unfairly compete for and/or remain in 'positions belonging to youth'. It is evident from all the above extracts that the participants feel frustrated about the complexities of poverty that appear to be dragging their livelihood trajectories.

Apart from their protest against lack of job opportunities for 'youth', these extracts also reveal the value and importance the participants attach to high educational levels in obtaining a livelihood. Although specific reasons varied, the participants generally indicated that the most challenging thing is lack or inadequate money to meet their diverse livelihood needs, which include amongst others improving livelihood conditions within their families. This narrative attempts to inform development policy towards considering and addressing contextual realities of youth livelihoods beyond the simplified money-metric approach. It highlights the diversity and complexity of the underlying causes and effects of poverty. It confirms that youth challenges in Botswana could be served by formulation of a national poverty alleviation framework (Government of Botswana and UNDP, 2000) because "the critical issue is not 'childhood' [youth/adulthood] but poverty" (White, 2002b: 734). The most important lesson for policy-makers and practitioners is to rethink the simplistic age-based conception of youth currently informing development thinking in Botswana.

Gendered power relations

Defining poverty from a holistic perspective as a multidimensional phenomenon calls for a critical consideration of inevitable power relations. The previous part revealed that in the process of obtaining a livelihood, the research participants are differently subjected to complex power relations operating in diverse contexts within which they are embedded. In defining their lived experiences in the process of obtaining a livelihood the participants make reference to challenges of complex and diverse 'unequal' power relations. Personal narratives presented so far clearly reveal that family and the wider societal contexts to which the participants belong are patriarchal in nature.

Although lived experiences varied, there is a popular perception amongst the participants that in historical and cultural terms men possess certain powers which women do not have. It emerged that the participants regardless of age and/or sex symbolically define and position 'men'

as ideal heads or breadwinners. It appears that most of the participants variously support or are participating in shaping the historically situated stereotypical gender identities and roles of both men and women. The following extract from the author's fieldnotes reveals that some young women believe that male headed households occupy a better social position than female headed households:

Another important issue emerged from Keabonye, a young woman I found talking to one potential participant I engaged with two days back. She stated that what she needs from a man is true love not how men nowadays define it as having sex, but being given advice and guidance and protection by a man. She said that gender equality is just a word of mouth as women will never be equal to men. She gave an example of single mothers who 'cry' that they are suffering. To her this is because they do not have husbands who should be heading the household. She stressed that "where there is no man there is no life".

Keabonye does not only emphasises on the gendered roles of men as being ideal for them to be heads of households but she also dismisses the practicability of gender equality. Such centring of power relations on men are largely shaped by deeply entrenched masculinities and femininities as captured in the following fieldnote, which reveals resistance by some young men towards what they perceive as a provoking challenge to their masculinities:

...Flavour to our discussion was added by Diphetogo, a young man who accused me for conducting a study which subordinates men. He maintained that livelihoods of young women are dependent on men as it has been the case all along. He said that women hold keys of whatever happens to them....He argued that women are never the same as "they change like the size of their hair". To him empowering women is for Emang Basadi [a prominent women's NGO in Botswana] to educate them about the limitations of gender equality. He said the sufferings of young women are due to receiving and utilising messages of gender equality wrongly.

An important point to highlight is that Diphetogo was not only disturbed by the nature of my study but also by 'me as a young man just like him' researching about women. However, on the basis of both his lived experiences and his gendered being as a man, Diphetogo was in actual sense contesting for the preservation of 'their' traditionally embedded masculinities. In pushing power towards men he attaches negative stereotypes to femininity and just

like Keabonye disapproves the notion of gender equality. The following points of view raised by Garenagae reveal deeply rooted gendered power relations that privileges men:

Men are people who struggle. They struggle with their hands and minds. For women life is easy because they get married. We as men we marry...If a man wants a woman he makes sure that she gets what she needs. A woman expects a man to provide everything she needs...I am not saying men have better lives than women. I am actually saying men have told themselves that "for me to be seen as a man, people must see my works". For a man to be seen as being man enough he brings food home and provide everything that is needed by his woman.

Garenagae defines and position men as destined to be breadwinners within a household or 'those who marry' and women as mere dependents or those who 'get married'. Interestingly, he acknowledges that it is not necessarily the case that men are better off than women but they 'work hard' to maintain their socially constructed masculinities of 'being men enough'. The perception that men are ideal providers emerged to be popular amongst the participants. In confirming Garenagae's assertion that there are some women who expect men to provide everything for them Kamogelo said:

Even though most of us young women are unemployed we have our people [boyfriends] who look after us. If a man is not working and if he comes from a poor family there is no one to look after him. But if a woman is not working her male partner will take care of her. This thing is both right and wrong. It is right for men to assist their female partners because men find jobs easily than us women. It is wrong because some men spend on their girlfriends forgetting their poor parents... I want to get married so that my husband can look after me.

Apart from her attempt to justify the 'dependence' of women on men, Kamogelo is also highlighting the significant role of intergenerational interdependences or linked lives within a family as well as viewing marriage as a potential means towards improving livelihoods. From a linked lives perspective, Keamegile, a young woman whose education was disrupted by the changing family context following their father's early retirement from work believes that her livelihood situation would be better off if her elder brothers take over as family providers:

I will not be here if our father was still working but I will be at school. His resignation created problems in our family. I have three elder brothers who

completed secondary education but they are not looking for jobs. They are only interested in drinking chibuku [a local brew]. I am working here not that I like but I have no choice. My brothers whom should be helping me are not working.

Keamegile does not only reveal her frustrations of being unable to continue with her schooling but she also defines her unemployed brothers as not being men enough to help her. Some of the participants define situations within their families from a masculine perspective. Despite appreciating that their widowed mother did a great job in raising them up, Garenagae still maintained that if he had many elder brothers than sisters then their scattered family would be having a place to call home.

These extracts reveal that the contextual realities upon which the research participants obtain their livelihoods are structured around power relations which are highly gendered. Beyond this paradoxical situation, it is on the basis of these power relations that different social identities and roles are defined and prescribed to the two genders of male and female. The extracts indicate that power and gender identities of men are explicitly and/or implicitly defined to play a significantly valued role for and/or on the livelihoods of women. Contrary to the above narratives that appear to position men as heads or breadwinners, Matshwenyego highlights that actions by some men negatively impact upon the livelihoods of women:

Most young women in this country have children who do not have fathers but they are there in life. Men do not want to take responsibilities. Whenever a child cries, she/he calls her/his mother not the father. This is the challenge we are facing as women...If you think of staying at home you will ask yourself how you will respond to this cry. That is why some women engage in prostitution. They are thinking about food, clothes and education for their children. The problems men create for women lead them to do things they are not supposed to be doing.

Matshwenyego is positioning her lived experience as a single young mother into the broader gendered contextual realities within which most young women in Botswana make their transitions to motherhood. The widely mentioned challenge faced by single 'young' mothers is the 'irresponsibility of men to look after their own biological children'. It emerged from this study and as reported in the literature that the problem of 'fatherless children' is still rampant in the context of Botswana. In the process of obtaining a livelihood young women are embedded within socio-cultural contexts which are highly gendered. The discussion reveals that the participants

regardless of sex consciously or unconsciously participate in strengthening these gendered power relations. These findings support an observation by Commeyras and Montsi (2000: 330) that "while considerable attention is being brought to bear on gender issues, it is clear to those concerned that changing deeply rooted attitudes regarding the superior status of males in Botswana cultures is going to take generations".

CONCLUSION

This paper presented some of the contextual factors shaping youth livelihoods in Botswana. It revealed that youth livelihoods are embedded within complex socio-cultural contexts. It emerged that 'the experiences of youth are diverse and complex [and] cutting across this variation, however are significant social processes which are affecting more and more people, young and old alike' (Wyn and White, 1997: 151). The implication for development interventions is that to be adequate in empowering 'youth' it is valuable to consider their complex livelihood contexts holistically. The family appear to be the most significant context which structure livelihood trajectories of youth in Botswana.

Meanings the participants attach to diverse episodes of their changing family contexts are based on meanings those episodes themselves have for them in the overall process of obtaining a livelihood. These findings therefore suggest that to be adequate in addressing livelihood challenges facing youth in Botswana it is worthwhile to pay increasing attention to the dynamics of family life. This conclusion echoes a recent call to view youth livelihoods in developing countries from the perspective of intergenerational interdependences (Ansell, 2005; Van Blerk *et al.*, 2008). The findings also revealed that in the process of obtaining a livelihood the participants are embedded within changing family contexts characterized by multidimensionality of poverty. It is observed that 'despite vitally important shifts in international policy towards children and youth over the past decades, these do not seem to have resulted in appreciable effects in eradicating poverty' (Chant and Jones, 2005: 196).

From a gender perspective, it emerged that livelihood trajectories of young women are embedded within complex socio-cultural contexts that define power relations in terms of socially constructed gender identities and roles of men as ideal heads and/or breadwinners. Although their lived experiences and points of view varied, it emerged that in most cases the research participants attach more valued meanings to the power of men within a household and/or in other socio-cultural contexts as compared to how they define the power of women.

This valuing of the power of men does not only increases dependence of women on men, but it appear to

make both young women and young men to be in opposition to gender equality. Although their perceptions in some cases appear to be contradictory, they generally demonstrate that the subject of gender equality and/or women empowerment in the context of Botswana is both confusing and controversial. On the other hand, the paper revealed that some 'young' men are in actual fact under intense pressure to maintain socio-culturally constructed status and/or expectation that men are 'providers' and/or 'those who marry'.

This study found out that interventions geared towards women empowerment in Botswana are largely focused on women with little or no consideration to men. This paper maintains that to be adequate in empowering women and in attaining gender equality, it is essential to pay attention to the socially constructed gender roles and identities of both women and men. The conclusion is explicitly and implicitly supported by emerging studies on men and masculinities in Botswana and elsewhere (Datta, 2004, 2007; Townsend, 1997).

It is equally important to note that the former Women's Affairs Department has been renamed Gender Affairs Department and Botswana's first Policy on Women and Development is currently under review to formulate a Gender and Development Policy. These institutional and policy-making reforms as suggested by Datta (2004) are moving beyond the Women in Development to adopt a Gender and Development approach. Hence, it will be more valuable to formulate and implement public education programmes on the notion of gender equality to be in line with these ongoing policy and institutional reforms. Above all, it emerged from this study that the research participants are not passive victims of the contextual realities within which they are embedded but they are actively exercising their social agency in many different ways to improve their livelihoods situation (Joseph, 2012).

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